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ABSTRACT

Educational reform movements aimed at providing equal opportunities for minority children have ignored the basic social, political, and economic context in which schooling takes place. Although equal educational opportunity has emerged as the central ideology of American schooling, underlying characteristics of American society prevent these ideals from being achieved. American society is fundamentally unequal and this inequality is perpetuated by limiting the access of subordinate groups to political, economic, and social power. The content and structure of schooling is not neutral, but actively reproduces this societal inequality through the knowledge and cultural mode which has been designated as a high status and through mechanisms by which groups are sorted and treated differentially. Schools are part of the larger societal dynamic which functions to perpetuate structural and cultural inequality, and school reform movements should be viewed, in part, as a reflection of dominant cultural beliefs. The following traditional assumptions about the role of schools in society are analyzed: (1) meritocracy; (2) upward mobility; (3) the myth of the "Model Minority"; and (4) functionalism. (FMW)

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State of Washington
Superintendent of Public Instruction

JUDITH A. BILLINGS
Superintendent

DR. DOYLE WINTER
Deputy Superintendent

WARREN H. BURTON
Acting Assistant Superintendent
Instructional Programs and Services

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A NOTE TO THE READER

This presentation explores the relationships between the American political and economic structures and the schooling potential for minority children. Further, the relationships are examined in the perspective of school reform movements.

The purpose of this exercise is to provoke thought and discussion about the greater phenomenon which tends to create educational environments for children. Hopefully, educational policy makers, practitioners, and citizens will continue working to improve teaching and learning environments in our public schools.

Warren H. Burton
Acting Assistant Superintendent

UNDERLYING CHARACTERISTICS

While equality has been the subject of endless public and scholarly debate in this country before the time of the American Revolution, implicit in American thinking has been the conviction that equality is a political entity, consisting of equal rights under the law. Tangential to this notion of political equality is the concept of individual competition for economic rewards. But, our economic and political structures are seemingly in conflict with the goal of equality of opportunity. Bowles and Gintis, for instance, indicate the contradiction between our political system and economic system. They observe:

> For the political system, the central problems of democracy are: insuring the maximal participation of the majority in decision-making; protecting minorities against the prejudices and discrimination by of the majority; and protecting the majority from any undue influences on the part of an unrepresentative minority . . .
>
> For the economic system, these central problems are nearly exactly reversed. Making U.S. capitalism work involves: insuring the minimal participation in decision-making by the majority (the workers); protecting a single minority (capitalist and managers) against the wills of a majority; and subjecting the minority to the maximal influence of this single unrepresentative minority.[1]

This basic inequality and authoritarian character of the economic structure coexists with America's democratic ideology with emphasizes equal opportunity for all citizens. Even though this contradiction is a fundamental societal characteristic, the unequal distribution of economic power has not been viewed as inconsistent with the concept of equality. Economic distribution is seen as being based on meritorious achievement, rather than on ascribed characteristics, and competition, equality of economic opportunity is guaranteed. Accordingly, equal educational opportunity has emerged as the central ideology of American schooling. Since schooling has been considered the primary mechanism by which economic attainment may be reached, public education has been a major focus for social reformers interested in providing an equal chance for minorities to participate in the "competition."

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[1]Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, Schooling in Capitalist America (New York: Basic Books, 1976), p. 34. While we are persuaded by the arguments made by Bowles and Gintis, we have found in instructive to review the equally convincing views of Michael Apple. Apple contends that Bowles and Gintis are too mechanical in their analysis. Several sound critiques have been made of the Bowles and Gintis thesis. See, David H. Kamen's review in American Educational Research Journal, 14 (Fall, 1977), 499-510: and Randall Collin's critique in Harvard Educational Review, 46 (May 1976), 246-251.

A second characteristic is the dominant impact of Anglo-American cultural patterns. For instance, historically, Anglo-American hegemony resulted in the assimilation expected of immigrant and minority groups. Although the United States has been a pluralistic society since its inception, the prevailing ideology has remained that of the Anglo-American majority.

William Greenbaum[2] suggests two overriding reasons why immigrant assimilation occurred so swiftly in this country:

> Most important is the fact that the main fuel for the American melting pot was shame. The immigrants were best instructed in how to repulse themselves; millions of people were taught to be ashamed of their own faces, their family names, their parents and grandparents, and their class patterns, histories and life outlooks. This shame had the incredible power to make us learn, especially when coupled with hope, the other main energy source for the melting pot--hope about becoming modern, and about being secure, about escaping the wars and depression of the old country, and about being equal with the old Americans.[3]

As most immigrants quickly learned, adoption of Anglo names, values, and behaviors was the unquestioned mode of participation in American social, political, and economic institutions. Similarly, minority groups have been largely influenced by this same socialization process. Both the dominant majority and most minorities, as Greenbaum noted, have been schooled to believe that conformity to Anglo-American cultural patterns is an essential part of being American. "Americanization: has been considered beneficial to the nation as a whole, in that it has provided a needed unifying element in society."[4] Likewise, "Americanization" benefits minority individuals because theoretically it provides them access to the Anglo-American "superior way of life." The popular rhetoric of the "melting pot" has only thinly disguised the fact that minorities, not the majority group, have been the ones expected to do the melting.

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[2]William Greenbaum, "America in Search of a New Ideal: An Essay on the Rise of Pluralism," Harvard Educational Review, 44 (August, 1974), 430-431. Greenbaum's brilliant essay has considerably influenced our thinking. His essay takes into account significant Anglo-American cultural values often ignored by some revisionists.

[3]Ibid, p. 431.

[4]See, for example, William Greenbaum, op. cit., John Highham, Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925 (New York; Antheneum, 1963); David B. Tyack, The One Best System (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), particularly Part V; Colin Greer, The Great School Legend (New York: Basic Books, 1972); Milton Gordon, Assimilation in American Life (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

As would be expected, this assimilation pattern has had a tremendous impact on the struggle for an equal chance. Equality has been viewed only in the context of the Anglo-American culture. Schools have operated almost exclusively from the Anglo-American conformity perspective and reforms have, until very recently, left this aspect of the school culture unquestioned. A dominating belief is that the acquisition of the majority culture is a necessary means of gaining access to economic and political power. Significantly, the schools have been viewed as the place where minorities could acquire the essential knowledge, values, attitudes, and behaviors which would provide access. School reform efforts should be seen, in part, as a reflection of these dominant cultural beliefs.

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNTITY: A CHANGING PERSPECTIVE

With the enactment of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, the notion of equality, or an "equal opportunity" for racial and ethnic minorities, was for the first time given legal sanction in American society. Historically it was hoped by the radical reconstructionists that an equal opportunity would mean full participation in American social, political, and economic life. The intent of the Fourteenth Amendment was undermined in large part by the Compromise of 1877; thus the hopes for equality by former slaves were dashed.[5] Not until the Brown (1954) decision would the Fourteenth Amendment be dramatically invoked to secure equal educational opportunity.

In the more than 100 years following the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment, the struggle to guarantee an equal chance for minorities has been primarily spearheaded by Black people and their organizations. Black political struggle has always been waged in the face of opposition from the executive, legislative, and judicial institutions at both the federal and state levels. Even though large-scale political battles were being fought, education was seen as the central vehicle for achieving an equal opportunity. For instance, the writings of such distinguished scholars as W. E. B. DuBois and Carter G. Woodson emphasized the critical importance of educational attainment and advancement for Black people.[6]

As we know, one of the first expressions of an equal education chance took the form of separate but equal educational resources and facilities for Blacks comparable to those provided Whites. Fair competition being the premise of equality, it was believed that the provision of equivalent educational resources would equalize the competition between groups for future economic rewards. Plessy vs. Ferguson, of course, functioned to accelerate the segregation of minority education, although the overwhelming historical evidence suggest equivalent facilities and resources were seldom a reality.

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[5]See, Rayford W. Logan, The Betrayal of the Negro (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1954).

[6]Each had a classic work on this particular subject. See W. E. B. DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk (New York: Crest Reprint, 1953); and, Carter G. Woodson, Miseducation of the Negro (Washington, D.C.; The Associate Publishers, 1933).

Although it was clear, early, that separate educational resources did not result in political, economic, and social equality, it was not until the Brown decision that the legal view of an equal chance took a new form, that of equal access to the same educational resources and facilities. By 1954, it was widely believed that the separation of students by race, itself, had led to inequities in both resources available to student and the resulting achievement differences between racial groups. Indeed, the Brown decision underscored the importance of education as a cornerstone of democracy.[7]

With the Brown decision it was hoped that the speedy desegregation of schooling, by providing access to the same educational resources, would correct inequality. But the process of school desegregation alone did not result in equal educational achievement for members of different ethnic and racial groups. Here it seems pertinent to emphasize that throughout Black educational history various strategies--some recurring--have been invoked in attempting to achieve equal educational opportunity. Since, Brown, integration and "community control" have been the most notable strategies. Yet, as Robert Newby and David Tyack point out, there has always been a common thread in these seemingly contradictory strategies, "Most of the debate really concerns the best strategies to achieve a common goal: power to Black people through the schools that command equal resources and provide a quality of education that will enable the race to advance."[8]

About 10 years after the Brown decision, the now familiar research began to emerge demonstrating that desegregation of schooling, where it had been implemented, had done little to contribute to academic gains for minorities.[9] Desegregation had, at least in its first 20 years, failed to provide an equal chance at education and seemingly had little impact on problems related to economic inequality.

A new perspective of an equal opportunity developed in response to the disillusionment with the continuing inequality in education outcomes in desegregated settings. While concerned with equal access to educational resources, this new perspective also considered equal performance as a

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[7]See Chief Justice Earl Warren's statements as cited in Alexander Kern, Ray Corns, and Walter McCann, Public School Law (St. Paul, Minnesota: West Publishing Company, 1969), p. 643.

[8]Robert G. Newby and David B. Tyack, "Victims Without Crimes: Some Historical Perspectives on Black Education," Journal of Negro Education, XL (Summer 1971), 193.

[9]A wide body of literature has been written on this subject. See, for instance, James Coleman et al., Equality of Educational Opportunity (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Office of Education, 1965); Christopher Jencks, Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effects of Family and Schooling in America (New York Basic Books, 1972); R. P. O'Reilly (ed.), Racial and Social Class Isolation in Public Schools: Implications for Educational Policy and Programs (New York: Preager, 1970); Nancy St. Johns, School Desegregation: Outcomes for Children (New York: Wiley, 1975).

critical variable. But equal educational performance was not possible if different groups of children did not begin schooling with equal conditions to do well. Thus, the cultural deficit hypothesis emerged to explain the continuing gap in minority and white achievement. Minority children were described as coming from disorganized and deteriorating homes and family structures. Such homes were seen as non-competitive and anti-intellectual environments which provided the minority child with little motivation for learning,[10] and little or no preparatory base for success in school.

Central to this belief was the premise that school should eliminate so far as possible any of these barriers to the full development of individual intelligence. As a result, compensatory education to many meant that "disadvantaged" individuals would be provided an equal opportunity to develop their highest potential level of intelligence.

Compensatory education, of course, is founded on the thesis that the essential problem rests with the learner. Major political or ethical problems with the schools themselves or the people who administer and teach in them are not seriously considered by the deficit model approach. But many have questioned this underlying assumption. Ryan's succinctly stated criticism of compensatory education is typical of those who challenge the essence of the cultural deficit theory:

> We are dealing, it would seem, not so much with culturally deprived children as with culturally depriving schools. And the task to be accomplished is not to revise, amend, and repair deficient children but to alter and transform the atmosphere and operations of the schools to which we commit these children. Only by changing the nature of the educational experience can the product be changed.[12]

Failure of compensatory education programs to improve achievement in their target populations had, by the early 1970s, caused some thinkers to look in other directions for a means of equalizing the competition for educational attainment. Differences among students were no longer seen as the absence of necessary development experiences as a result of impoverished backgrounds. Reflective of anthropological theories of cultural relatively and linguistic theories of language and dialect competence, this perspective challenged the idea that providing children an equal chance meant eliminating cultural and ethnic differences. It must be noted, however, that this new emphasis did not supplant the generally held

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[10]See, Frank Riessman, The Culturally Deprived Child (New York; Harper and Row, 1962); and Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan, Beyond the Melting Pot, Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1963).

[11]H. A. Averch, How Effective is Schooling: A Critical Review and Synthesis of Findings (Santa Monica, California): RAND Corporation, 1972); Martin Carnoy, Schooling in a Corporate Society (New York: David McKay Company, 1972); and Jencks, op. cit.

[12]William Ryan, Blaming the Victim (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 61.

assumption of Anglo-conformity. With this shift in thinking, the hypothesis of cultural difference replaced that of cultural deficit and changed, once again, the notion of what was necessary to insure an equal chance for minorities. This charge directed the focus of some reformers away from the characteristics of the learners and toward the characteristics of the school experience as the objects of reform. The monocultural curriculum content, testing and grouping practices, and the expectations of educators for minority children came to be seen as the major barriers to educational equality. The structure and culture of the school, deeply rooted in the nation's Anglo-American conformity tradition, became the target for reformers with the move toward multicultural education as the means by which an equal chance could be guaranteed.

In the final section of this essay we will take up the underlying premises of education as multicultural and consider whether or not this approach can contribute to providing an equal chance. Here, we believe it appropriate to turn to a discussion of a few of the overriding schooling assumptions regarding equal educational opportunity for the minority child.

TRADITIONAL ASSUMPTIONS RE-EXAMINED

Three widely held beliefs assert that schooling and its expansion can provide equality of opportunity even in a society with large-scale inherent inequalities. It is the power of these belifes which has prevented, until recently, a close examination of schooling and its relationship to the society structure of inequality. Following our discussion of these three beliefs, we will consider an alternative perspective on schooling.

Meritocracy and Education

The first belief about the educational system is that the process is meritocratic in nature. Reflecting a dominant value orientation, this belief holds that status and success should be determined by effort, merit, and ability. Accordingly, achievement is deemed to be a more rational way of allocating status than inherited privilege. Past social reforms, including school reforms, have not infrequently been aimed at preserving fair competition needed for emergence of an "aristocracy of individual talent."[13]

Equal educational opportunity, based on meritocracy, means insuring fair educational competition by removing social obstacles. In practice, governmental funding for compensatory educational programs reflect such an approach. From this perspective, educational opportunity focuses on individual responsibility. In effect, upon receiving extra compensation, the individual is expected to utilize available resources to compete

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[13]For a brief but cogent discussion of equal opportunity from a sociological perspective, see Philip Wexler, The Sociology of Education (Indianapolis: Bobbs and Merrill, 1976).

fairly. Individuals not achieving success have only themselves to blame--lack of motivation or ability--since they did not avail themselves of the additional advantages made available by government intervention. Since the system is based on merit, the argument goes that those who rise to the top are the most talented and skilled. Those that succeed do so because they have the most drive, motivation, and academic talent. Essentially, this attitude reflects a belief in the fairness and neutrality of the educational process.

Recent critiques of schooling, however, have raised serious doubts regarding the relationship of educational achievement to economic reward. Even though school achievement appears to be determined by objective measures, test scores and grades, Bowles and Gintis, for example, found a pattern of relationships between grades and certain personality traits, such as punctuality, dependability, and submissiveness to authority.[14] In this way, academic achievement is actually a measure of middle-class value conformity. Simply stated, schools are organized to reward certain values and not others. Thus, the ideological neutrality of the school is questionable.

Studies indicating the effects of social origins on educational outcomes tend to further undermine the neutrality argument. Locally, the meritocratic thesis would seem to suggest that educational expansion will diminish the relationship between educational attainment (performance or persistence in school) and parents' social status. Nonetheless, Bowles and Gintis' review of available data indicates the number of years of school attained by children is as dependent upon family background today as it was fifty years ago. In addition, they found that neither the level of cognitive skills nor IQ can account for occupational attainment. Instead, a person's income was found to be dependent on his educational level and family status.[15] If meritocracy truly operates in the educational system, occupational status would have been shown to be a function of talent and motivation.

William Sewell summarized the cumulative disadvantages of low status students by stating, "We estimate that a higher SES student has about 2.5 times as much chance as a low SES student in continuing in some kind of post-high school education. He has an almost 4 to 1 advantage in access to college, a 6 to 1 advantage in college graduation, and a 9 to 1 advantage in graduate or professional education."[16] Thus, we believe there is persuasive evidence available at least to question the meritocractic thesis regarding public schooling.

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[14]Bowles and Gintis, op. cit., see Part II.

[15]Ibid; see Chapter 2 and Part II.

[16]William Sewell, "Inequality of Opportunity for Higher Education," American Sociological Review, 36 (1971), 795.

Educational and Upward Mobility

A second widespread belief which follows from the meritocractic thesis is that education provides an important avenue for upward mobility; therefore, expansion of equal educational opportunity enhances the prospects for the talented and exceptional among the dispossessed--poor and minorities--to have a fair shot a high status jobs. Equalizing educational opportunities then is deemed as a positive means for affecting the distribution of material rewards in the larger society. As we pointed out above, belief in education is central to the American democractic ethos. Certainly, this belief has bolstered by numerous studies which have documented that education is a key variable for occupational success or status attainment.[17] Nevertheless, two aspects related to the notion of the educational system as a vehicle for upward mobility require examination. The first is the expectation that educational expansion and increased access to educational credentials will lead to status mobility for minority groups. The second addresses the effects of this increased success: the actual translation of educational credentials into greater economic success and higher status for minorities. Both issues raise questions about the underlying assumptions concerning the role of schools in increasing economic and social equality.

As Greenbaum noted, hope can be seen as a pivotal element in examining the assimilation process experienced by immigrant groups in our earlier history. This is no less true today. Many of low socio-economic status frequently cling to hope. Even though there is great despair in our ghettos, gilded ghettos, barrios, and reservations, the element of hope is not nonexistent among the dispossessed. Hope allows survival as people seek to cope with the unsettling life of the poor. Reformers, school officials, and concerned social scientists also hope that equal educational opportunity will lead to increased upward mobility for low status groups by providing the necessary educational credentials to succeed in the economic mainstream.

Educational expansion, it is believed, will equalize the distribution of the needed credentials. Yet, a consistent finding of research on occupational attainment is that when levels of educational credentials are equal, the socio-economic status of parents is a strong predictor of the future status of the children.[18] In a 1967 study, for example, Blau and Duncan found that changes in rates of mobility over a period of time indicated that the relationship beween the father's status showed no consistent change between 1920 and 1960.[19] In other words, the ability to

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[17]See William Sewell and Robert Hauser, Education, Occupation, and Earnings, (New York: Academic Press, 1975).

[18]Ibid.

[19]Peter Blau and Otis Dudley Duncan, The American Occupational Structure, (New York: Wiley, 1971).

predict the occupational status of children from the knowledge of the parents' social status was just as great in 1960 as it was in 1920. Using data from the 1970 census, Blau and Duncan also confirmed the conclusion reached in their 1967 study, namely that the rates of mobility between nonmanual and manual occupations have not changed significantly in recent times.[20]

Significantly, these studies underscored the strong, consistent relationship of the parents' socio-economic status and the children's occupational status or earnings. Thus, it cannot be necessarily assumed that the expansion of educational opportunity lead automatically to equalizing the distribution of credentials required for high status jobs. On the contrary, it would appear as though educational expansion has not reduced ability of high status parents to pass on their status to their children. Students from high status origins have consistently obtained more educational credentials than less privileged students. The gap between social classes in the acquisition of credentials needed for high status jobs have not narrowed. In sum, a number of studies examining educational achievement, social class, and social mobility provide no clear evidence that access to higher status jobs has been equalized. Yet, the persistent belief remains: low status groups will gain access to high status positions via schooling.

The "Model Minority" Myth

Although access to educational credentials has increased for low status groups, as the previous discussion indicates, translating this achievement into economic success remains debatable. In this section we believe it important to deal with one commonly held notion regarding the upward mobility of one particular minority group. Asian-Americans are frequently cited as being unusually successful in using education as a vehicle for upward mobility. In fact, Asian-Americans are often referred to as the "model minority."[21] This "model minority" image emerged because Asian-Americans have been able to achieve a higher level of education and greater upward mobility in comparison with other visible minority groups. However, in his examination of the "success" of Asian-Americans, Robert[Suzuki found that while the group is one of the most highly educated ethnic groups in the country, education has not produced as much earning power for Asian males as it has for White males with the same educational background.[22] For example, his analysis of 1969 data from the U.S. Department of Labor, comparing the relative earnings of White, Blacks, and

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[20]Reported in Robert Hauser. "Temporal Change in Occupational Mobility and Evidence for Men in the U.S.," American Sociological Review, 40 (June 1975), 279-297.

[21]See Harry L. Kitano and Stanley, Sue, "The Model Minorities," The Journal of Social Issues, (1973), 1-10).

[22]Robert Suzuki, "Education and Socialization of Asian-Americans: A Revisionist Analysis of the Model Minority Thesis," Amerasia Journal, 4 (1977), 23-52.

Chinese at different levels of education (high school graduate, college graduate, and postgraduate) disclosed that the percentage of Chinese males earning $10,000 or more was consistently below that of White males at the same educational levels, and below that of Black males at the postgraduate level. Suzuki also examined data from the 1970 U.S. Census on median annual incomes of individuals, median years of schooling completed, and the median ages of Whites, Blacks, and three major Asian subgroups by sex. While the median income of Japanese males was approximately 10 percent above that of White males, Japanese males' median years of school and age were substantially greater than those of White males. Suzuki's findings led him to conclude that Asian-American males are generally "underemployed, underpaid or both . . . the celebration of their phenominal 'success' as the model minority is, at best, premature and, at worst, a devious deception."[23]

Suzuki's analysis pointing out lower earning power for Asian-Americans even when they have attained an educational level comparable to Whites would appear to contradict studies indicating that individual income is primarily depended on educational level and family socio-economic background. He suggests this earnings discrepancy for Asian-Americans is greatly influenced by stereotyping and racism.[24] Importantly, he also contends that the economic position of Asian-Americans may be affected by the differential socialization they receive in schools. It should be noted that while Asian-Americans have attained high levels of education, most of them have been channeled into white collar jobs with little or no decision-making authority and low public contact. Suzuki believes that the limited upward mobility of Asian-Americans can be traced to the combined factors of a demand for workers to fill lower-echelon white-collar jobs due to an expanded economy after World War II, and the kind of socialization acquired by Asians at home and in schools.

In this instance, it seems appropriate to ask what role schooling plays for Asian-Americans. For us, Suzuki's observations and those of others cited in this paper, indicate that in the case of Asian-Americans schooling is designed to maintain the unequal structure of American society by reinforcing and inculcating noncognitive traits in students which are characteristic of their family's socio-economic background. Suzuki's preliminary analysis points out a need to examine a greater detail and treatment of cultural and ethnic factors in the process of schooling. While Suzuki's work is not definitive, this initial analysis does raise doubt about the belief in the educational system as a vehicle for upward mobility, particularly for minority groups. Clearly, before any substantive conclusions can be reached, more thorough research in this area is required.

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[23]Ibid, pg. 41.

[24]Ibid, pg. 42.

Functionalism and Schooling

Failure of equalizing efforts through the educational system may be due to a third widely held view of the functions and role of schooling. According to the traditional functional view, skill requirements in an industrial society steadily increase because of technological change. In such a society, education in complex industrial states serves to provide the specific skills and knowledge necessary for employment. Formal educational credentials signify that an individual possesses the skills and knowledge necessary for economic production. As technological changes create greater demand for highly skilled workers, educational requirements for jobs and occupational stratification emerges. Occupational stratification is not dysfunctional to the system but is a necessary outcome because of the differing and complex technological needs of the society. Education, then, serve as a reasonable selection process. Since all in society have equal access to schooling, the completion of high levels of schooling and the resultant access to high status occupations are generally considered a matter of individual achievement. Understandably, the achievement model of mobility is followed where factors of ability and academic performance are held to be key determinations of career success.[25]

Recently, there has been much empirical evidence to dispute this functional notion of schools. Functionalists have been challenged by the credentialist school of thought. In part, credentialists share Max Weber's idea that society is composed of differing status groups competing for power. Credentialists maintain that members of all groups would like high status occupations and are capable of being trained for them. The school's function, say the credentialists, is not to train, but rather to teach people the cultures of different status groups.[26] Cognitive achievement and knowledge are not really important, because the level of educational attainment required for job entry in most occupations is far greater than necessary for efficient functioning on the job. Achieving higher levels of educational attainment, or "certification" becomes in and of itself the means of access to high status occupations. Furthermore, schooling discriminates on the basis of ascribing characteristics and social position, therefore, it is usually a result of belonging to a particular status group in society.

Not surprisingly, credentialists dispute the functional theorists' explanation of the relationship between educational attainment and occupational attainment. Ivar Berg has shown that there is little or no relationship between academic achievement and job productivity.[27] In

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[25]Carolyn Perrucci and Robert Perrucci. "Social Origins, Educational Contexts, and Career Mobility," American Sociological Review, 25 (1975), 451-463.

[26]Randall Collins, "Functional and Conflict Theories of Educational Stratification," American Sociological Review, 36 (1971), 1002-1019.

[27]Ivar Berg, Education and Jobs: The Great Training Robbery (New York: Praeger, 1970).

addition, other evidence has suggested that educational credentials, rather than cognitive skills, are the best predictors of future status and earnings.[28] Collins, operating within the conflict model, has disputed the notion that the increase of educational requirements for jobs is purely the result of the demands of a high technology society. For instance, Collins has indicated that employers have increasingly required higher educational attainment for even bottom-level jobs. There has not been a decisive shift, however, in the job skill requirements during the same time period as this increase in educational requirements. Within some jobs, educational requirements have outstripped needed skills. Thus, even though jobs have not changed, employers are demanding more education for those jobs. Collins concluded that education serves as a credentialing function, with educational credentials being used to ration access to high status occupations.[29]

AN ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Educational reform movements aimed at providing an equal chance for minority children have been largely based on the three predominating beliefs about the way schooling functions in American society discussed above. By not looking behind these assumptions, critical aspects of schooling which may have great impact on the role schools play in the attainment of equality have gone unquestioned. School reform movements have, for the most part, ignored the basic social, political, and economic context in which schooling takes place. Reforms and reformers frequently have ignored the powerful influence the form and content of the school experience itself have on those who attend schools. To be more precise, the following kinds of questions have been neglected: How has certain knowledge come to be more appropriate for school curriculum content than other knowledge? By what mechanisms have certain realms of knowledge been given higher status than others (science and math as opposed to vocational subjects, for example)? How have various types of school knowledge been distributed among groups? In short, we simply ask whose class and social interests have been served by the form and content of schools.[30]

Bowles and Gintis have suggested that school plays an important part in maintaining economic equality among classes in American society. By socializing children differentially with the values and personality characteristics of the class of their origins, students are prepared to meet the demands of the occupations they will be expected to assume within the existing class structure. In addition, the educational process itself socializes students to accept as legitimate and inevitable the present social order and their future roles within it. In this way, schools as

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[28]Christopher Hurn, The Limits and Possibilities of Schooling (Boston, Mass.: Allyn and Bacon, 1978).

[29]Collins, op. cit.

[30]Michael Apple, "Ideology, Reproduction and Educational Reform," Comparative Educational Review, 22 (October, 1968), 367-387.

institutions function to reinforce the social relations of economic life. This is accomplished through "the close correspondence between the social relationships which govern personal interaction in the work place and the social relationships of the educational system."[31] Bowles and Gintis do not contend that the educational system operates in this manner as a result of the conscious intentions of teachers and social administrators, but rather as the effect of the close structural similarities in the social organizations of schools and the work place. As the work of Bowles and Gintis suggests, through differential treatment of different groups of students the school actively reproduces the inequality of the larger society.

On the other hand, as Apple suggests, the school is not simply "a passive mirror but an active force, one that also serves to give legitimacy to the economic and social forms and ideologies so intimately connected to it."[32] Here the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu is particularly instructive. Bourdieu, for instance, has analyzed the link between the dominant cultural values and the reproduction of economic inequality in a way that sheds light on American schooling reforms. Bourdieu contended that cultural capital, consisting of middle-class values, behaviors, and language patterns, is the commodity necessary for the acquistion of social and economic power in society.[33] Such an analysis seems consistent with the prevailing American belief that Anglo-American conformity is the central route to upward mobility. The schools, in Bourdieu's analysis, however, do not function to impart this cultural capital to those children who do not acquire it in their families. Instead, schools use cultural capital as a sorting mechanism for the distribution of children into their future societal roles. Schools function as though all children have equal access to cultural capital. However, we contend that cultural capital is unequally distributed as a result of the division of labor and power in society. By treating this cultural mode of the school as neutral (not serving the interests of any one group over others) and operating as though all children have access to it, the schools implicitly favor those who come to school having already acquired the linguistic and social competencies to function effectively in the middle-class. Compensatory education programs, assuming the neutrality of the system, attempted to change minority children by giving them more of the same. For example, more White middle-class culture and knowledge was emphasized, without ever questioning why it was considered the appropriate content of school knowledge, or the underlying function of a monocultural education system. We find Bourdieu's analysis instructive in helping to explain, as well, why multicultural educational programs are not universally implemented in our culturally pluralistic society.

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[31]Bowles and Gintis, op. cit., p. 12.

[32]Apple, op. cit., p. 386.

[33]Pierre Bourdieu, "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction," in Jerome Karable and A. H. Halsey (eds.) Power and Ideology in Education (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

SUMMARY

It is believed a critical analysis of the accepted beliefs about the nature of schooling--the belief in the neutrality and fairness of the educational system, the belief in education as a vehicle for upward mobility, and the belief in the functional purpose of education as one of imparting objective skills and knowledge necessary for a technologically complex society--contributes to an understanding of why school reform efforts have generally failed to increase equality in the society. Furthermore, the work of Apple, Bowles, Gintis, and Bourdieu suggests an alternative perspective on why an equal educational opportunity for minorities has not been achieved. Essentially, this alternative argument sets forth three main propositions: **first**, that American society is fundamentally unequal and this inequality is perpetuated by limiting the access of subordinate groups to political, economic, and social power; **second**, that the content and structure of schooling are not neutral, but actively reproduce this societal inequality through the knowledge and cultural mode which have been designated as a high status and through mechanisms by which groups are sorted and treated differentially; and **third**, that schools are but a part of the larger societal dynamic which functions to perpetuate structural and cultural inequality.

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JUDITH A. BILLINGS
Superintendent of Public Instruction

Old Capitol Building, FG-11, Olympia, WA 98504-3211

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